

MASTERS by Winn Claybaugh, March 2022
Bryan Anderson: “No Turning Back”

Content Warning: This episode contains graphic descriptions of injuries resulting from explosive devices.



In October 2005, while escorting his unit commander on a routine mission to visit Iraqi police stations, **Bryan Anderson** lost both legs and his left hand from an improvised explosive device (IED).

Cedric King, who suffered similar injuries in Afghanistan in 2012, joins **Winn Claybaugh** and Bryan for one of the most exhilarating MASTERS conversations to date. Both inspirational heroes are ambassadors for the Gary Sinise Foundation and both agree that they are stronger and better people because of their experiences.

WC: Hi everybody, Winn Claybaugh here and welcome to this wonderful issue of MASTERS Podcast. These are the days that I look forward to. I lose sleep the night before I get to do these types of interviews. I'm already emotional, starting off, and I haven't even introduced who I'm sitting here with today, but I need mentors and heroes in my life who have a story to tell. There was a double amputee who was asked the question, "How are you so positive after losing both of your legs?" and his response back was, "Why are you so negative with both of your legs?" And that really hit me hard that I need these types of stories because they remind me that I have a pretty beautiful life, I have a sweet life, and nowadays on this planet there is so much that people could complain about and nobody would blame you if you woke up and, "Woe is me and I want to give up and my life sucks." Nobody would blame you for having that type of an attitude and so we need these types of stories. We need these two men to help us put things into perspective, to help us be better dads, better moms, better human beings, better parents, better neighbors, and that's what this interview is going to be all about. So, first I'm sitting here with Bryan Anderson and I'm going to read this. He enlisted in the United States Army in April of 2001 and his deployment date was on September 11 of 2001. He served two tours of duty in Iraq, was stationed in Baghdad, and earned the title of sergeant in the military police. On October 23, 2005, while taking his unit commander on a routine mission to visit an Iraqi police station, Anderson's Humvee drove past an improvised explosive device, an IED, in southeast Baghdad. Due to the impact of the explosion, Bryan lost both his legs and his left hand. He then endured 13 months of rehab at Walter Reed Army Hospital and Bryan was awarded the Purple Heart because of his injuries. Now I'm also here with a good friend who is not a stranger to MASTERS. I had the honor of interviewing Cedric King several years ago. Since

then, we've had the pleasure of sharing the stages and I'll have to tell you—we were trying to figure this out—I bet I've hired Cedric at least 60 times to go to different locations within my company, just because his message is so profound. And a little bit about him: Master Sergeant Cedric King entered the United States Army in 1995 and during his 20-year career, Cedric graduated from several distinguishing schools in the army, including the United States Army Jumpmaster Course, the United States Army Pathfinder Course, Air Assault Course, and the United States Army Ranger Course. Cedric is the recipient of the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Legion of Merit and is an awardee of the Order of Saint Maurice, the patron saint of the infantry. On July 25 of 2012, during his second tour in Afghanistan, Cedric was severely injured by an improvised explosive device. The explosion caused internal injuries, permanent damage to his right arm and hand, and the amputation of both of his legs. Cedric now refers to that moment as his finest hour. And I know that that's a lot for our listeners to take in. I'm sitting here with two true-life heroes. It's interesting how people, nowadays, will use that word, *hero*. What really is a hero? And I'm here to say, truly I'm sitting with two heroes that we can learn so much from; the stories that you have to share. So, first of all, Bryan and Cedric, thank you so much for being a part of MASTERS Podcast.

CK: Thanks so much, Winn. It's an honor to be here.

BA: It's an honor to be here.

WC: So, Bryan, I think what we want to do is get into your story and I think that having Cedric, I just kind of want to be a fly on the wall. And I'm grateful to my friend Cedric because he's going to help guide us as we hear your story and having been through something very, very similar himself, I think he's the perfect co-host for me today. So, let's just go from there and I get to sit and listen to what the two powerful mentors are going to teach us.

CK: So, I got to ask you, bro, what made you want to come into the military, man? Uh, you're a talented guy, look like a John Cena, Jr.. What made you want to come into the military, man?

BA: [*Laughs*] Well, honestly, it was, um, something I just kind of wanted to do. So, there's a story behind that where I used to be a gymnast in high school and I was very athletic and I really enjoyed doing things like that but I really busted up my ankles and I got a job at American Airlines. And so I was working at American Airlines at O'Hare for a couple of years and, you know, they had those recruiting commercials, the army, and showing obstacle courses and things like that.

CK: [*Laughs*]

BA: And me being that gymnast it's just like, I know I can do that. Like, I kind of want to go do that. My cousin—

CK: Yeah.

BA: —had been in the military, my grandfather and, you know, I was looking at my life working at American Airlines, that I could have made that a career—

CK: Yeah.

BA: —but that didn't take me away from Chicago, really, at all.

CK: Yeah.

BA: And I saw my life just kind of sticking around and being in Chicago and not very exciting. And so I always wanted to help people, too. I have an identical twin brother and when we were kids we used to run around with “FBI” taped on the back of our windbreaker jackets.

CK: *[Laughs]*

BA: And like bang, bang shoot 'em up and— *[laughs]*

WC: *[Laughs]*

BA: So, it just kind of seemed like it was a good fit that would take me and get to see the world and go do things and meet people that I would never have met otherwise. And so that's really what the drive was, in the beginning, was just, you know, go do something good. You know, something for your country, something for other people, and also be a part of something that's bigger than yourself and that—

CK: Yeah.

BA: —really kind of spoke to me. So, me and my girlfriend, we decided to join. And he's right, it was in April of 2001, and we were on the delayed entry program so we had a few months to prepare but then the date that we were leaving was September 11.

CK: Shhh.

BA: And like that morning we woke up, because we had a party the night before, it was our last day and I wake up to, you know, planes hitting the Twin Towers and it was just like in shock and awe of what was happening.

CK: Yeah.

BA: I called up the recruiter, I was like, “Hey, are we still coming in? What's happening?” And he goes, “I don't know. Just come on in and we'll figure it out.”

CK: Yeah.

BA: And so we went to the met station and just sat huddled around the TV all day.

CK: So, that's a great point and what you're bringing up is—Winn, you might not know it man, but that one day probably changed the base of our nation's military because that day so many young men and women felt compelled to want to get in the fight. They wanted to do something. And for me, I joined when there was no war, so I got a chance to see the difference between why I came into the military and why he came in. Two totally different reasons but this guy felt a calling and that's so powerful, man. I mean, so many people probably were like, "Hey, I'm coming in," and when they saw the towers fell, I'm pretty sure there's a lot of people's like, "Man, I don't want to go in the military." But you stuck with it. You swore in the second time. See, normally we swear in twice.

BA: Right.

CK: It's a delayed entry program swearing in, and then there's a swearing in before you go to basic, which is like, "You're in now." And that speaks to his character, Winn. That's amazing, man. Uh, wow!

BA: It's funny you bring that up, too, because we were supposed to fly down to Fort Leonard Wood. Well, obviously all flights were cancelled and so then it wasn't around midnight, one o'clock, before they got a couple of buses for us to jump on and we drove seven hours to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. And on that bus ride all this stuff is going through your head of what just happened that day.

CK: Yeah.

BA: And I kind of figured that I would see recruits being like, "I don't know what I just did—"

CK: Yeah.

BA: "I made a mistake, I need to get out of here, I need to figure out a way out."

CK: Yeah.

BA: It wasn't that at all. It was—

CK: You ran to the fires.

BA: —that grit. Yeah. Like, "You know what? This really sucks, what just happened to our country, but you know what? We get to be the ones to do something about it."

CK: You see that, Winn? Winn, you hear that? That's the mark of someone who is going to be successful no matter what because when something happens, he's a take-action person. And Bryan, I'm not surprised, man, that you've made it to where you've made it from, man, because you're the type of person that gets stuff done. You run to trouble to fix it, to do something about it.

WC: Hey Bryan, I heard you say on another podcast that the definition of courage is you have the fear but you do it anyway. I even heard, after September 11, years later, people saying, “Oh, I haven’t jumped on a plane yet. I don’t want to jump on a plane because I’m afraid.” That’s not the answer. That’s not the solution to what we’ve all been through. Can you address that? Why would you share that as being something that you focus on; what courage really, really means?

BA: So just because, you know, you see somebody being brave and courageous, that doesn’t mean they’re not afraid. And sometimes that fear can help drive you and keep you safe at the same time. But you go into it knowing that and you know what needs to be done and you have the courage to do it anyway. I mean, honestly, that’s really all I meant by that was just because you’re brave or courageous doesn’t mean you weren’t afraid. You just chose to do it anyway.

CK: Yeah, you can’t call it courage without fear.

BA: I agree.

CK: It wouldn’t be courage. You can’t.

WC: Wow. I think it’s important. We need to hear your story, Bryan. So, take us to that day of when you were driving the Humvee.

BA: Okay, well, to give you a little back story, you know, I was there for 2003. We were there for the invasion. That first year that I was there, our mission was top 55 guys, deck of card stuff, and we were part of a task force called Task Force Gauntlet where we kicked in doors and took those top guys out of their homes. Not all of them. You know, there was a couple of task forces doing that but, you know, we got a few of them; cool guys. I think the lowest one was Saddam’s brother-in-law. So, the first year I was all over Iraq. We bounced around, kind of went everywhere and then, you know, after a year, like that March—

CK: In March.

BA: —we came back and we were home for eight months and they said, you know, “If you’re going to go anywhere it will probably be Afghanistan and it won’t be for a while.” Well, then after four months they said, “Hey, guess what? You’re going back.” We’re like, “Wait, what?” We were home for a total of eight months and then we got sent back and this time they’re like, “Oh yeah, you guys are going to be stationed in Baghdad.” And I’m just like, *[bleeped expletive]*. *[laughs]*

CK: Yeah. Yeah.

BA: So then we fly in, straight into BIAP [Baghdad International Airport] this time—

CK: Yeah.

BA: —and they did one of those combat landings, like where you're one the C-130. They're above the airport at 30,000 feet and then they just like nosedive and start slamming down.

CK: Because you have to. You have to. Winn—

BA: Yeah. *[laughs]*

CK: It's not like riding on an airplane when you're flying into LAX, where you know the airplane just started going into descent. In Iraq, it's so difficult because they're constantly shooting down airplanes. They have to dive in real tight to make it into the glide path because they're constantly getting attacked from rocket attacks. In Iraq, that was a big thing: rocket attacks.

BA: Yeah.

CK: And they could hit an airplane and knock everybody out. That would be a great day for the bad guys. Go ahead, man. I remember those.

BA: That was crazy. But me being the adrenaline junky and the gymnast that I am, I'm sitting there looking through this, like, window, watching the ground just like spin.

CK: Yeah.

BA: Because we were just going around and around and around. I'm sitting there like this is absolutely incredible. Meanwhile, the guy next to me and the guy on the left—

CK: Throwing up.

BA: —are throwing up and I'm just like, *[laughs]* "This is crazy." Oh! And so we finally—

WC: Wow.

BA: —get there and they were making it seem like these IEDs were absolutely insane. Well, at the end of the first year they started coming out with IEDs but it was like a Pepsi can with a wire sticking out of it.

CK: Right, right, right.

BA: They didn't even pop a tire and you're just like, "Pssh, whatever. Keep going."

CK: Yeah.

BA: And so now, when they're talking about these IEDs, our minds are automatically going back to, like, these little homemade bombs that weren't really doing anything and I'm like, "Whatever." Well, then we get into the truck, the unit that's

going to take us to the base that we were going to be at for the next year. We were driving—

CK: Right.

BA: And, all of a sudden, we got hit with an IED. It didn't hit any of the trucks, it hit in between the trucks and it was just kind of like, "Holy crap, what the heck was that?" And these guys were like, "That's an IED." So, it was just like a regular up-armored Humvee but we were all just sitting there talking. And all of a sudden this explosion goes off right around you and this concussion just like riddles through your body.

CK: Yeah.

BA: You didn't even know what it was. It was all dark again because of all of the smoke and you just kind of like popped your head up and you're like, "What the heck was that?" and these guys turn around and they're like, "That's an IED," and we're just kind of like, "Whoa!" I mean it's like one of the most awesome power forces you've ever felt in your life. I mean there's nothing really here in the United States that can give you what that feels like to be next to.

CK: If you've ever been on the jetway of an airport and there's a big plane, a jumbo jet taking off, and the power of it goes right through your body, imagine that times like 10 and it's just one shock wave, one thunderclap. Or if you've ever had lightening hit close to your house, like right there—

BA: Yes.

CK: It's like that but with the power that can go through your body. It's like he said, man, we thought that these were—they used to be like soda cans—

BA: Right.

CK: —that would have like some little, you know, but then they started getting 155-millimeter shells that would blow up. I mean, these are mortar shells that they usually shoot through cannons and the power of it is very terrifying.

BA: Yeah, I mean, so we finally make it back to the base because nobody was injured or hurt or none of the trucks were disabled and we all get out and we all just kind of look at each other with these like ghost looks, like, "Oh, you know what?" And the way we got through it is we're like, "Alright, well, we're in a combat zone. It's not going to be peaches and cream every day. We're bound to have our issues. Maybe this just was one of those days and it's not going to be like that every day." Ha! Sure enough, it was pretty much like that every day.

CK: Every day.

BA: We had a—

CK: If you're not getting blown up, it's probably another platoon or another company. So, every day you leave, somebody is getting blown up. And get this, Winn, there are only a few roads that you can go on that they target and they know that we have to ride on those roads. So, you know that you're going to possibly check out today or tomorrow. That's why veterans today are living under this, like, cloud of, like, suicide because for so long you've been on alert for years and now you come back home and you're looking at any time some lightning or anything goes down—a backfire from a car—you're automatically on edge again. And it's like you have to live that way the rest of your life and it's tough to do. It's easy to talk about. It's tough to do, though.

BA: I got past that. I was very lucky and I forced myself to be in those situations: go to fireworks, go somewhere where there's loud bangs and noises, and just like watch it and be like, "I know this is happening, I know this is not going to hurt me. I need to just be used to that again." It's like—

CK: What made you want to go back into it, though?

BA: Well, because I didn't want to be afraid for the rest of my life.

CK: You didn't want to be afraid for the rest of your life?

BA: I didn't want to have my back towards the wall in the corner of a restaurant every time, where I always had to keep an eye on everything. I knew that I needed to get it in my head that I was home and that I was safe and these things kind of happen. And if I didn't, I don't know who I would have been or become. Like my confidence would have been shaken.

CK: Yeah.

BA: I just wouldn't be sure of myself and so I mean I kind of just tackled that fear, like going head into it—

CK: Yeah.

BA: Being like alright and just having that power of mind to—

CK: How long did it take for you to be able to go to the places, like the fireworks or the gun range, and the explosions happen—

BA: It was like two years.

CK: —but it didn't own you. How long did that take?

BA: It was like two years. I mean, yeah, it didn't happen overnight by any means but I was also doing things with my life after the fact of getting blown up and going to these ceremonies at Arlington Cemetery—

CK: Yeah!!

BA: —where they're blowing off the cannon and I'm just like, "Guhhh, oh man." But there was that drive that I needed to be there. I wanted to be there and I wasn't going to let that control my life.

WC: See, that's a great message right there. There are people who got divorced 40 years ago and they still refuse to date. They refuse to trust. They refuse to engage again and reconnect with somebody because of a bad relationship years and years and years ago.

BA: Yeah.

CK: Isn't that what courage is, though? You being afraid that you could be hurt again—

WC: Mm.

CK: —and you're going back in it again and again. And I will say this: you talk about courage, man, it's like you do it and you have to continue to do it to build it up. It's not like you can just be courageous one time.

WC: Wow.

CK: You gotta continue to be courageous for it to start working the way that we see it on TV and on movies and in sports. You have to continue to do it. One time won't be enough.

WC: So, Bryan, you had the experience of what the explosion of an IED feels like. Now take us to the day of October 23, 2005.

BA: So, we started going outside the wire all the time and it wasn't a question of if we're going to get hit, it was: when we get hit, is the armor going to hold up? Is it going to be one of those stories where I watch shrapnel go by my face but I didn't come out with a scratch or is it going to kill us all? I can tell you that soldiers don't necessarily think about coming back halfway. You think you're either going to make it or you're not. And coming back like this, I didn't even think was an option or possible, I guess. But so, it was around 11 o'clock in the morning and we loaded up our trucks and we were going out to our first Iraqi police station, because this mission was different. This was more about training the Iraqi police and getting them to be able to police their own country. So, we started going out to different police stations in our radius, making sure that they were doing everything that we had trained them to do: basically, holding their hands, policing their country.

CK: Yeah.

BA: And we had a six-mile radius with six different police stations. Within that six-mile radius, we had 60 IEDs going off every single day. It was incredible.

CK: That's what they call the fighting season; usually summertime. The Iraqis that are fighting against us, they come out and they do hits on Americans every day. And I'm pretty sure, Bryan, you'd probably seen some of your friends get banged up or killed before you got banged up or killed.

BA: Oh, yes.

CK: How did it feel the first time you saw someone else get destroyed or blown up or killed?

BA: Uh, that's tough, man. Two of my friends—I used to ride with one of them, he was from Wisconsin. The other one was from Detroit. And we all, in the barracks, all lived like right next to each other so we were like our core group. And man, um, about two months before I got hit they got cut in half and that was difficult. You just kind of have to move on.

CK: Yeah. This is so important because a lot of people think that it's just the moment. The thing that makes that moment harder is when you gotta come back to your cot and you see their cot empty. That's the thing that sends chills through your body because you'll never see them again. And, oh by the way, you could possibly have to see their wife, daughter, kid, mom on the other side when you get back home.

BA: That was one of the hardest things, was seeing the father—

CK: There's nothing tougher than that, I don't think.

BA: Yeah.

CK: Knowing that you're living on for them. That's tough.

BA: Well, that's exactly how I moved on is, you know, now we live for all those guys that didn't make it and, you know, it's up to me to honor their life by living a good life.

CK: Yeah. Winn talked about being a hero. Really, those are the heroes; the guys who can't be on the podcast now.

BA: I agree. Um, we didn't make it to the first police station. We were driving, and we kept a bubble of 250 yards between us and the traffic to create distance between us and civilians and things like that. And because of that, we were only doing like five miles an hour. And how we kind of coped with everything in Iraq is like humor and you make fun of the stupidest things but you laughed at it and you were childish in ways. We happened, me and my buddy Kenny, happened to be

making fun of our commander at the time, who was a couple of trucks in front of us [laughs]. We called him Captain America, uh—

CK: It's not a good thing.

BA: Yeah, not really. I understand now and thankfully he has forgiven me because I was a little hard on him. Anyway, I had both of my hands on the bottom of the steering wheel like this and my left leg was curled up underneath my right leg and my right leg was down driving. And because we were only doing five miles an hour, I was like, you know what I'm going to grab a cigarette and I took my hand, my right hand, off the steering wheel, reached in my pocket, grabbed a cigarette, stuck it in my mouth, and when I went to go light the lighter, it was almost that I triggered the explosion because I saw the spark from the lighter and the flash from the explosion at the exact same time.

CK: Wow.

BA: And then the next thing that I saw was just pitch black. And it wasn't because I was knocked out or anything. It was just there was so much smoke inside the truck, you couldn't see anything. But I definitely felt like I had gotten my bell rung.

CK: Yeah.

BA: Like ringing in the ears, kind of just that dazed kind of vision, especially with it being black with all the smoke. And it actually spun me sideways. And what happened was it cut my legs and my left hand off instantly. My legs were in the floorboard, my hand was in the passenger seat. Kenny was sitting in the passenger seat and he said that my hand actually hit him in the face and landed in his lap and he just jumped up and got out of the vehicle before it even stopped moving. And so now he's running alongside of the truck before we even stopped moving. And then the gunner, Gietzel, he got the Forrest Gump wound—shrapnel in the butt—and he jumped out of the top of the turret. And so, meanwhile, I'm like gathering myself, trying to, and I just went, "Hey, we got hit, we got hit! Are you guys okay, are you guys okay?" And I didn't hear anything and that scared me so I tried like looking harder and, all of a sudden, I saw green and I'm like, "Wait, why am I seeing green?" And when I thought that, I kind of relaxed all my muscles and my head dropped backwards and I was like, "Whoa, why did my head drop backwards?" Well, like I said, what happened was it actually spun me in the seat to where I was laying on my back in the driver's seat with my legs, or what was left of my legs, towards the radio mount and when I looked up and looked to my right, I was actually looking at the back of my seat, which was green.

CK: Wow! Wow!

BA: Then I told myself, "Okay, get up. Get out," and I don't know what I did to try to do that. I just realized, after a few seconds, that I couldn't.

CK: You guys got doors on or doors off at that time?

BA: Doors were on; combat locked, too. So, they had to, like, bust the bolts off.

CK: Okay.

BA: And so, I didn't really know anything was all that wrong with me yet. I just knew at this point that I couldn't get out of the vehicle myself.

CK: Wow!

BA: And I probably would have started freaking out, thinking everybody was dead, if it wasn't for the fact that like three seconds after I had that realization, I heard my friends starting to bust the bolts off the door to open the door. And so, I knew help was coming. And Kenny and Gietzel ran to the truck in front of us, grabbed that driver and said, "Hey Anderson's not out yet, let's go get him." And so then they ran back and that's when they were busting the bolts off. The door flies open and I look at them and they pull me out and I got like a really good fresh breath of air, and so that kind of woke me up a little bit more. And so now I'm realizing I'm being carried and I'm looking around trying to figure out, like, are we still being attacked? Is anybody doing anything? Is anybody shooting? And I'm trying to, like, feel for my weapon but I couldn't feel anything. And so then they get me out on the sidewalk and there was blood on my face. And the flies in Iraq are so nasty and so impersonal and they're buzzing around my face and the first thing that I did was I just went to wipe my face like this and get these flies away from me. Well, that's when I noticed that my index fingertip was missing and I'm kind of like, "Oh, okay," and then I looked up at my friends and they were all freaking out like they'd all just seen a ghost and nobody was shooting, nobody was doing anything. They were just kind of running back and forth from me to the truck like they'd all just seen a ghost. And so, I'm like, "Okay," and I see my finger and I'm like, "Okay, yeah, that's not really going to give 'em that look." And then I turned my hand over and where that tattoo is on my hand, that chunk was missing. I could see into my hand, like the shattered bone and the torn ligaments, and I was just kind of looking at that and I was like, "Oh, that's gross." And then a fly landed in my left eye and because I was looking at my right hand, I went to go wipe it away with my left hand and I just whiffed. And then I looked and I saw my sleeve hanging down and blood dripping down and that's when I was initially kind of just like, "Well, [bleeped expletive], okay. That really sucks but I still don't think it would cause my guys to act the way that they were acting," and that's when I decided to look down. And as I looked down, they tried to force my head back down to the ground, but I saw what had happened and my legs were gone.

CK: They didn't want you to see it?

BA: No, they didn't want me to see it.

CK: Yeah.

BA: But I saw and I kind of just, in my head, let out this whole string of swear words like, *rr-nah, rr-nah, rr-nah, nope that did not just happen*. And then I got this really weird feeling like, *Oh crap, my mom's going to kill me*.

WC: Wow.

BA: It just popped in there. And then I realized that I hadn't actually said anything to these guys yet and so I look up, I'm looking at myself, and they're all freaking out and Michael Wait's fumbling around with the tourniquets and I just—I don't know where it came from, I never thought I was the typical guy until this moment, but I reached up, I grabbed his arm, and I went, "Holy crap, dude. Do you ever think I'll get laid again?"

CK: *[Laughs]*

BA: And he just started laughing. He told me later that when I said that, it made him realize that I was still there and I wasn't just a body draining out and that put him right back on track, where he needed to be.

CK: Isn't that also the moment where you know—we were talking about this earlier—isn't that the moment where you know that you're tougher than you thought?

BA: Oh, for sure.

CK: You're like, I could still be funny—

BA: *[Laughs]*.

CK: —in life-threatening situations.

BA: You know, I was totally in shock and I don't know. Yeah, my body protected me from feeling most of it. Um, it just kind of felt like a burning sensation all over, kind of. Like too much—

CK: Very hot.

BA: —too much Icy Hot. And then, you know, as I'm laying there, though, it hurt to breathe, it was hard to breathe. The concussion of the blast collapsed my right lung but at the same time, you know, I did not feel like I was going to die.

CK: Yeah.

BA: And I feel that if you're in that moment and you were, that you would feel it or have notion, inkling, something, and I didn't. At the same time, I was a combat lifesaver, too, so, you can't help but self-assess yourself and I told myself, *You know what? Even though it hurts to breathe and it's hard to breathe, go through those motions, make those muscles*. And I just *[takes two deep breaths]*. Little air is better than no air. And then I told myself, "Stay awake. Talk to these guys."

You'll be fine." And we laid there for like 12 minutes, waiting for the helicopter to land, and the helicopter landed and they used their bodies to cover my wounds, to protect it from all the dust wash. And I remember bouncing on the stretcher and getting into the helicopter.

CK: Yeah.

BA: And I looked at the medic and I was like, "Hey man, I need air, I need air. It's really hard to breathe." He's like, "Alright, alright, let me lock you in." I heard the locks click in. They put that tube thingy—it wasn't the mask, it was the tube.

CK: The tube. Was it through your nose?

BA: Yeah, and honestly, that's where I felt comfortable enough to kind of just relax and then I kind of put my head back and just passed out.

WC: So, from the time of the explosion until the time you're now on the helicopter and you're thinking, *Okay, now I can relax*, how much time had passed? And by the way, you were conscious and aware through all of that?

BA: Yes, and it was probably about 13 minutes that I was awake.

WC: Wow.

BA: The helicopter took 11, 12 minutes to get there, then loading up on, looking at the medic, I would say it was about 13, 14 minutes that I stayed awake.

WC: Wow.

BA: And so the pilots were even told not to land there and the pilot was like, "If I don't, this kid's dead," and he landed in an impossible spot with like a foot of clearance on every side of the rotor.

CK: Geez!!!

BA: Just dropped it down. It was insane. But, so I knew I was only probably a two-to-three-minute flight away from the green zone and the hospital.

CK: The green zone is like the place where all the United States people are.

BA: Yeah and I, you know, was expecting to wake up to some doctor poking and prodding me like, "Hey, can you feel this? Does this hurt?" Something or another and it literally felt like three seconds from the time that I closed my eyes to the time that I opened them again. And when I opened them, my mom was there and I'm like, "Mom, whoa wait, what are you doing?" She's like, "No, no it's okay. You had an accident." I'm like, "I know I had an accident but what the heck are you doing here?" I'm thinking like some idiot brought my mom to Iraq.

CK: Right.

BA: That ain't cool.

CK: Me too.

BA: And then she does the mom thing like, "You going to let me finish?" and she gives me the look. And I'm like, "Yeah, okay." And she goes, "It's seven days later."

CK: Yeah.

BA: "You're at Walter Reed in Washington, DC." I was just like, "Wait, what?"

WC: Wow.

BA: "Uhh, I'm back in the United States already?" And she's like, "Yeah." And I'm like, I was so happy that I didn't have to remember the flight back or anything, that I was just there already.

CK: [Laughs]

BA: That was fantastic. And then not only was my mom there but my twin brother was there, my sister, my dad, my aunts, my uncles; like literally my whole family was there. And you know, that was kind of one of the moments where, alright, I'm waking up as a triple amputee and it's kind of like, okay, now what? I had no idea what kind of quality of life, what kind of care I would need for the rest of my life; what, if any—I didn't know where I was going or what could be done but the fact that my family was there and showing that support like kind of gave me the strength to be like, alright, you know, I know that they're going to be there if I need them; if I need to lean on them and what not. So, just take it a day at a time and see where things go. And, you know, the first few months sucked. I was only in the hospital for like four weeks but then I was outpatient at the Mologne House, it was like this hotel we stayed at. And I just went into Walter Reed every day and did my stuff and for some reason I had a pretty good attitude most of the time. There was one dark period after like four months where I was in the shower, just washing myself, and I got it in my head like, *Oh my gosh I'm half a person. I'm literally half a person.*

CK: Yeah.

BA: And then girls kind of popped into my head too, like what girl would want that? Like no girl says my dream guy is somebody that's half a person. And I kind of lost it and—

CK: Yeah.

BA: —went into like a depression and panic attacks and things like that. And that lasted for a couple of weeks and I just started looking around at Walter Reed, seeing how many soldiers were coming there, and that was depressing in itself.

CK: Yeah.

BA: Granted, most of the soldiers had great attitudes; not everybody, but once they got over the initial shock and all that and they started their therapy, soldiers had good attitudes and we were all there for each other. It didn't matter what branch, didn't matter what MOS [military occupational specialty] or anything like that. We were all there for each other and that was really cool. But just seeing the sheer amount of soldiers going through there was depressing. I'm watching this reflecting pond, talking to my brother on the phone, and he's like, "Dude, you need to listen to music, you're a music baby," and so I put on some music. One of my buddies' bands from high school was Rise Against and they gave me some of their CDs and one of their songs came on. It was called *Survive* and the chorus of that song more or less goes: *We've all been hurt, we've all been sorry. Take a number, stand in line. How we survive is what make us who we are.*

WC: Wow.

BA: And for some reason that just like resonated with me, like, okay, now I'm just surviving now. And I felt like I grabbed that first rung of the ladder of pulling myself out of that hole. Then I'm looking around again at Walter Reed and I'm just like, "Nope I got to get out of here." And so, at that point in time, I hadn't experienced any kind of real life in like 16 months. I had been at war for almost a year before that. I'd been in therapy and at Walter Reed for another four months. I needed to remember what life was about, like, and I looked at my mom and I'm like, "Mom, we gotta get out of here," and she's like, "Alright, where do you want to go?" And I'm like, "My best friend lives in Vegas, let's go to Vegas." And so, an hour later I was on a plane to Vegas and I spent three days down there with my best friend Sarah and my mom and I had fun. I feel like the power of fun is underestimated. I was there, I was focusing on what was in front of me instead of what was behind me, and I was having fun. And I felt that, you know, after that weekend, I'm sitting back by that same reflecting pond and for me this was my choice. I thought about being depressed and feeling like crap or I thought about this weekend where I was just there, focused on what was in front of me, lived in that moment—

CK: Yeah.

BA: —and it caused me to have fun and I enjoyed it and I'm like, "Who do you want to be? Do you want to be depressed or do you want to have fun?" And I'm like, "Why can't I just go out and have fun all the time?" So, then I just started putting myself out there and that's where everything changed, is when I just put myself out there and lived in that moment.

CK: I gotta ask you this, though. There was a time, you just talked about it —this was a tough one for me—when you found out that you could be loved in spite, and I say loved, but I mean accepted, when was the moment you found out that you could be accepted in spite of your injuries? That it didn't matter what you looked like anymore? You could still be attractive, you could still be funny, you could still be accepted. A lot of people go through this and never come out. And I know when it was for me but when was it for you? When was the moment you knew you could be accepted again?

BA: It was kind of like storybook for that. Right before—two months before I got blown up, I left Iraq for two weeks for R&R.

CK: Yeah.

BA: And went on our family vacation and I met this girl and it was like *Love Story* kind of stuff, right? I'd only really spent like eight hours in her presence. Well, then I left, I went back to Iraq, and then two months later I got blown up. And so, I didn't tell her. I just kind of was ghosting her, blowing her off. Well, my twin brother told her.

CK: Ohh!!

BA: And she sent all these emails and called and all this stuff and finally I just accepted. I was like, "How could you want to be—"

CK: Right!!

BA: "—whatever?" and she just pushed on and pushed forward and came out and visited and that really helped me get there. Granted, we're not together anymore or anything.

CK: But that helped you know that you could be loved—

BA: But she happened to be my first girlfriend. Yeah.

CK: —beyond what you look like.

BA: Absolutely.

CK: Ahh!

BA: And then, you know, there was more of that because, once I got out of the hospital and I came home, I was lucky and I came out on the cover of *Esquire* magazine.

CK: [*Laughs – claps hands*]

BA: And that [laughs] opened a lot of doors and opportunities for me and so I really started just going out and having fun and going to these events and I was meeting girls because me and that girl weren't together anymore by the time I left Walter Reed. And I realized that people were drawn to me. Girls were drawn to me and it had nothing to do with sympathy. It was the persona and the attitude and the confidence that I put out there.

CK: Yeah.

BA: And I made it easy for people to be around me. It wasn't like when people come up, "Oh, sorry, look at you." And I'm like, "What are you talking about? You're good. I'm good."

CK: Yeah. I'm alright, yeah.

BA: And you put them at ease and it just allows them to get to know you, And, man, I've had more luck with women like this than I ever did before with legs.

CK: [Laughs]

WC: Oh my gosh, you guys, now this conversation's going to go someplace that—

CK: Alright, my bad. I'm a guy. I had to ask him, I had to ask him.

WC: Can I, can I—I want to share with our listeners a little bit more. So, after all of this, let's see, you met Gary Sinise. Both of you are very connected to the Gary Sinise Foundation. Bryan, you wrote a book and Gary Sinise did the foreword for the book, but Bryan, you've also acted on TV shows like *CSI: New York*, *All My Children*, *The Wire*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *Magnum PI*. You've also been in movies: *The Wrestler*, *American Sniper*, an HBO documentary called *Alive Day Memories: Home from Iraq*. You were also a stunt driver for the movie *Dark Knight* and you became friends with Heath Ledger. Again, you mentioned *Esquire* magazine, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, interviewed on *60 Minutes*, so you've done quite a bit.

BA: So, that kind of goes back to that simple question of, you know, if you could go back to that day, would you change it? And all those experiences and everything that I've done has created the person that I am today and so—

CK: Right.

BA: —no, I wouldn't change that because I've had such an incredible experience that I don't think I otherwise would have had. And, you know, it's—

WC: You talk about—

BA: —a journey.

WC: —quality of life, and maybe a question for both of you: the quality of life, what were some of the real, real difficult things that you had to endure, that you had to figure out, like, okay, this is—my life is different and I don't have legs. I'm missing limbs here, things that maybe the rest of us take for granted every single day. Give our listeners an idea of exactly what does that look like, to have quality of life?

BA: So, at first, you know, you have a lot of support, a lot of friends around, people willing to do things for you, but then you kind of realize, like, look, if I always have people do things for me, I'm never going to be able to do it on my own. And so, when I moved into my condo, I didn't want it to be accessible —or, like, it's accessible, don't get me wrong, but like I don't have lowered countertops, I don't have lowered cabinets, so that I can prepare myself for when I don't have that luxury of having lower countertops or things like that. And I did it, you know, it was a slowly, gradual buildup of learning my skills and learning how to do things over again but, you know, one, having a power chair really allows me to live. I'm single; I live alone. Granted, I have, you know, people come in and clean every now and again, but taking out the garbage, doing the dishes, you know, all your daily chores, I figured out how to do on my own and, you know, having the power chair really allows me to do that, especially with one hand. And, you know, you just kind of work through your procedure, I guess. At first, it's difficult but the more you do it the easier it gets; the little tricks you learn. One of my hardest things, and you guys are all going to laugh, maybe. Out of everything, the thing that really pisses me off the most are buttons and zippers.

CK: Ahh! God!

BA: Like— *[laughs]*

CK: This little button right here—I know for you it's got to be mind-numbing, but that little cuff link button right there drives me crazy.

BA: Yeah, yeah.

CK: It drives me crazy, man.

BA: And so, you know, I also don't have a problem asking for help when I need it. Like, it took me a while to get there but I live in a condo building with a bunch of great neighbors and so, like, I'll button the shirt, like a button-down shirt, with my teeth and whatever, get it all, pull it over but I can't do that—

CK: That little last button, yeah.

BA: —or the wrist ones because I've got to get my hands in first and so I'll go to a neighbor with this top button and my wrist buttons and be like, "Hey, you mind buttoning me real quick?" *[Laughs]*

CK: Yeah. Do you drive? Do you still drive?

BA: Oh, yeah.

CK: Do you got the van or what you got; like some sports car? What do you got?

BA: I have a few things, man. I have a motorcycle. It's one of those Can-Am Spyderys with the three wheels—

CK: Oh man, I want to get one of those.

BA: Two in the front, one in the back. Yeah, I have an Audi—

WC: Wait a minute, how were you a stunt driver for the film *Dark Knight*?

BA: Well, that's a misleading term, kind of.

WC: Well, I read it out of your bio, so you wrote it, not me.

BA: Right. Well, I worked as a stunt man as a driver.

WC: Oh, I see.

BA: So, I got paid as the stunt man and this was the first movie, first real thing I had ever done and this stunt coordinator saw the *Esquire* magazine and said I wanted to be an actor and a stunt man and he just said, "Hey, we're filming a movie, *Dark Knight*, in Chicago. Why don't you come down and we'll give you a shot, see what you got or whatever. You can just see if it's something you'd like to do." And when they were having, like, a chase scene, they'd have the actual stunt drivers but they would also have us as like traffic and we would keep distances and drive slow so that these actual stunt drivers could drive through into those gaps and do what they needed to do.

WC: Wow.

BA: So, that's kind of what that really was.

WC: We can edit that part from this interview if that's going to hurt your chances for getting girls. I mean—

BA: No, I'm good.

WC: I'm just saying. I wanna, I—

BA: I'm honest.

WC: —I wanna be part of the campaign to help you out, Bryan.

BA: *[Laughs]* I appreciate that. No, but I'm honest. I don't—

WC: *[Laughs]* Okay.

BA: —overindulge on anything really, I just speak truth.

WC: You know, both of you are involved in, you know, extreme sports. So Cedric, you ran the Boston Marathon, what was it, 20 months after you lost your legs? You were then in the Boston Marathon, which you've ran now, how many times; seven times?

CK: It's seven times.

WC: You've done the—two times you've done the New York City Marathon, you've done Ironmans, you've done the Disney Marathon, which is 48.6 miles. Completed four out of the six major world marathons in Chicago, Boston, New York, Berlin. You're training now for the Tokyo and London. And you know, Bryan, you yourself also. Talk to us about extreme sports and why you pursue that. I mean, I'm thinking, from my perspective it's like so people like me can get off of our butts and realize I need to still keep myself out there. What's holding me back? So, I get it for selfish reasons of why I want to hear these stories, but from your perspective, why?

BA: Well, to be honest, it has nothing to do with anybody else, really, except for the fact that, you know, I was always an adrenaline junkie. I liked doing things that, you know, were crazy, going fast, doing things. So, you know, just because I don't have legs—you know if you have that mindset of like, *Oh my gosh, you don't have legs, you can't go climb a tree.* I'm the guy that's like, *Well, how do you know until you try?*

CK: Yeah.

BA: And so, I told myself I didn't want my life to be much different before and after. I want to still do the same things, and so I started skydiving and snowboarding and doing things. I snowboarded with prosthetic legs, things like that. I don't do that so much anymore because it is kind of like a lot, like kind of like a pain in the butt.

CK: Yeah.

BA: But I'm going towards other things that I really enjoy and for the longest time I've always wanted to play wheelchair rugby, which I'm now part of an all-veteran team playing wheelchair rugby.

CK: Whaaat?

BA: Murder ball.

WC: Wow.

CK: Yeah!!

BA: It's fun, man. Three weeks ago, I got my butt kicked in Kansas City. I'd been playing my first year since October. Up until that weekend, I'd only been flipped three times in my chair. This weekend, this two-day tournament, I got flipped four times and I rolled away with a black eye and I still can't even feel my teeth.

CK: *[Laughs]*

BA: Yet. But I went head-on collision with this guy. He was like a big dude, man, and I wasn't going to move him so I was looking back and when I hit him, because I don't have the legs to hold me in place, my body just rag dolled down into his knee and my face, right here, smacked his knee. I thought I broke my cheekbone and I saw stars and I had to get pulled off the court because I was like out of it, you know?

CK: I seek out the tough stuff to do. Not just because I'm a junkie or I'm some sort of pain freak, but I want to challenge myself; no different than me challenging myself going to war and being better at doing the things that are uncomfortable. And I think that that's actually what makes everything else more comfortable, when I do the uncomfortable things.

BA: Yeah. Yep.

CK: So, when you were at Walter Reed, you had this thing happen. You had talked about there was like a four-month period where it was like—I don't want to put words in your mouth, but was that harder than the blast The few months after the blast?

BA: For sure.

CK: Not when you were inpatient but when you became outpatient.

BA: Absolutely, because you just have an uncertainty on am I strong enough to do this? Am I ever going to live a good quality of life?

CK: Yeah

BA: There were just a lot of questions.

CK: Yeah.

BA: But there was another triple amputee while I was there, his name is Joey Bozik, and he got blown up almost a year, exactly, before me. And so he was a year into his rehab by the time I got there. And he's the one who really made a profound impact on me. And one of the things was like, look man, the hardest thing is accepting that this is the way you are now and you're—

WC: Wow.

BA: —going to keep trying to do things the old way. You kind of have to just start over, learn things new, and accept that this is who you are now and this is the way that you are.

CK: That's hard.

BA: And once you're able to do that, then you're able to move on and grow. And I mean, that night he got me to realize that and accept it and so after that point I just started growing.

WC: Wow.

BA: And then that's where things started to become a little bit better and started to have some fun and realizing I could have fun again and—

CK: Yeah.

BA: —things like that.

WC: That is such a great, great message because, again, we live in a society where people just want to claim themselves to be a victim and sometimes for the most insignificant, ridiculous, petty situations and circumstances. I mean, how many people now are victims just because of COVID?

CK: Yeah.

WC: But the whole planet, we're all going through this at the same time. All of us have that choice and I know that I've heard you talk about that, Bryan; about being a victim and having to make that decision on which way you were going to swing.

CK: How did you not take the moment where you realized that you were different and that things were going to be tough—and keep in mind, you're 24 when this happened?

BA: I was, yeah.

CK: You're in your mid-twenties, supposedly like the most fun part of your whole life, and now you have to go through life, at this point, sort of like if you were 70 or 75. You're in bandages every day and surgeries. I don't know, I did surgeries three times a week when inpatient and there's so many surgeries afterwards. And you're wondering how in the world am I going to live like this for the rest of my life, not knowing you can change that, just with your outlook. You could change the way that you felt about things with the way that you look at them and it's a choice. Bro, how did you just switch it? I get it, he told you, he told you that as soon as you accept it. I'm still having trouble accepting that I can't run as fast as I did before or I can't do certain things the way that I did before. I'm still struggling with it. I did this marathon three weeks ago, down in Florida, and I'm bummed out

because I didn't run it as fast as I could have run it when I had legs. I'm still struggling with that.

BA: I mean, that is also, you know, fuel. And you want to get somewhere, you want to be the same as you were—

CK: Yep.

BA: —and run as fast you could—

CK: Yep.

BA: And just because you have that gap, that's always going to help you to get faster and stronger and push for that.

CK: Wow.

BA: It gives you a goal. But you know, yeah, that's just—sometimes accepting something isn't very easy, either. And it sucks to have to realize that.

CK: Letting it go. It's—

BA: Yeah but—

CK: Wow.

BA: —just be who you are and own it.

CK: Yeah.

WC: I love that message that the two of you keep on sending out; that word *fuel*. What fuels you? You know, for me it's I'm a dad. What fuels me is listening to your stories. I think it was Tony Robbins that talks about our drive, our fuel, is either through inspiration or desperation.

CK: Yeah!!

WC: Desperation can be the experiences that you've been through. I don't want to have to go through those experiences. I want to learn through the inspiration. That's why I seek out mentors such as the two of you. I want to hear what you've been through. I want to hear what you had to go through to overcome this because that's inspiration. And the desperation is "I consider myself a victim."

CK: You did not say one time that you didn't want the lower counter tops. You didn't want the everything accessible. You wanted to know that you were just as strong or you could adapt. That's something that I really need to look at, right there, because I admire that in you. It's so inspirational. When the countertops were lower, I'll admit, man, I adapted real quick and I wanted them to be lower for a little while and I didn't like the fact that the cups were like way up here and

everything, it wasn't perfect. But sooner or later, I started adapting to the automatic doors, you know—

BA: Uh huh.

CK: —that you just push the button and they open up for you and everything was like, had a ramp and it actually made me weaker, man. Because the moment I got to somewhere, maybe somebody's house, and they had stairs and you had to figure it out, I was like, golly, I really got to, you know, go in and do the training and accept the fact that everything isn't going to have a ramp. There's going to be steps and there's going to be, you know, like curbs and weirdness.

BA: Well, do you remember you were talking about the aisle chair?

CK: Uhh!

BA: I've been on that one time. I've traveled almost every week for the last 15 years, on airplanes; there and back, whatever. I've been on thousands and thousands of flights.

CK: Well, did you scoot?

BA: Yeah, the first time they put me in an aisle chair, I felt like Hannibal Lecter. They put straps—

CK: Yeah.

BA: —everywhere.

CK: It's a seatbelt, man.

BA: And I'm just like, "I don't need that, like, I'm good, I still got my trunk." "Nope it's policy sir, you have to," and I'm like—

CK: Yeah.

BA: "What if I choose not to use this chair?" And after that first flight of doing that, I'm like, "Screw this!" I just jumped down, put my backpack on my back, and just hopped to my seat and then just popped into the airplane seat. And so then, you know—

CK: What about when you gotta go to the bathroom on the airplane?

BA: Just jump down and go to the bathroom.

CK: With all the people watching you and stuff?

BA: Yeah.

CK: And that part right there, that part right there is amazing because you have no fear of people looking at you. You're going down the aisle to a bathroom that everybody else is basically—like the bathrooms are not always clean in there.

BA: No, and I'm wiping down—

CK: Especially four hours into a flight. What do you do?

BA: I open the door, I grab some napkins, I wipe down the floor of it, and then I just hop in. And I, you know, the first couple of times I did that, it was weird because I'm like, "Oh my gosh, everybody's looking at me."

CK: Yeah.

BA: They're like, "Look at this kid crawling on the floor," and this and that. But I had to tell myself, you know what, it's not about them. It has nothing to do with them. If I want to be comfortable and go to the bathroom and get this done, you just got to do it. And so, it's like the army teaches you, you know, adapt and overcome.

CK: Got you.

BA: And so I really lived by that motto and I just, alright, it's not about you. For the first couple of times, I put my head down when I did it and just, like, I just blocked out people looking at me. Now I've done it so much, I look people right in the eye and I'm like, "Hey, what's up?"

CK: [Laughs] Ah!

BA: And I just keep going [laughs].

CK: Did you hear what he just said?

WC: Yes, oh my gosh. [laughs]

CK: That's incredible. It's finding meaning in the suffering.

BA: And then somehow, pride comes out of that.

CK: Shhh! Stop! What did you just say?

BA: And some way, somehow, pride ends up coming out of that.

CK: How? You gotta explain that. How?

BA: Because, like, you've accepted yourself. You're comfortable with who you are, and when you're going down that airplane and you're looking at people and you smile and say, "Hey, how're you doing?" like you can feel proud because you're not embarrassed, you're not—you're just doing what it takes to live and be you.

WC: Wow.

CK: On something that would be shameful, you turn it into pride.

BA: Yeah.

CK: Into power.

BA: Because nobody's helping me do it. I'm just doing it.

CK: Winn, you gotta get him on—take please. I gotta take notes, bro. Go ahead, Winn.

WC: I'm already a little emotional here. That one got me.

CK: I got tons of amputee friends. I've never heard anybody do—that's ballsy, right there.

WC: No, but I can guarantee you that if there are 200 people on that plane, there's at least half of them that are walking off that plane thinking, *Okay, my life is great. Why am I complaining? Why am I focusing on things that really do not matter?*

CK: Shhh!

WC: So you are that true hero that—who comes along and you teach us what we need to know. You teach us what we need to look at and what we need to change in our lives. You guys, the two of you are—can you believe that we have been talking for way over an hour now?

BA: There's no way.

CK: Yeah.

WC: Let me just wrap this up.

BA: Yep.

WC: I'm so, so grateful to the Gary Sinise Foundation. Bryan, I know that you're also a spokesperson for USA Cares, a nonprofit organization that helps post September 11th veterans. Let's just wrap things up with a quick mention about—maybe not a quick mention, but a mention of the Gary Sinise Foundation.

CK: Yeah.

BA: Well, Gary Sinise Foundation has been incredible. I was friends with Gary before he started it. It was more just doing like Lieutenant Dan Band stuff and then he created this foundation and I was one of the first guys to be asked to be an ambassador. And I was just more than honored and Gary has really given so much of himself and figured out where the need is and what type of help needs

to be there. And he really kind of steps up and fills that void. I couldn't be more proud of the man he is, the work he does, and just the fact that I'm extremely honored to be a part of that.

WC: Mm.

CK: Yeah; yeah.

BA: Yeah.

CK: Man, I cannot express that more. Gary came along at a time in my life where we didn't know. We had a house right outside the base in Fayetteville, North Carolina, but it had like an upstairs and to go to bed I would have to go upstairs every night. The wheelchair was always downstairs and it was just like it wasn't going to be something that I could do long term. And Gary says, "Hey look, we want to have you as part of the foundation. Would you be willing to be a part of it; the R.I.S.E. program?" And I was like, "Yeah!" I had always been a fan of Gary's. As a matter of fact, the first time we met, I asked him—it wasn't even about any house or R.I.S.E. program. I'm at this dinner with Gary and I asked him, I'm like, "Bro, how in the world did you swim? You jumped off the boat in *Forrest Gump* and you had these two pants that were tied. How'd you do that?" And he was like, "It's all movie tricks." But Gary sat down and talked to me, no kidding, 45 minutes to an hour; just one-on-one. He wasn't trying to run off on me and trying to run to a flight and that's when I knew he's a real dude.

BA: Right.

CK: He really was and he helps first responders. What this guy does for policemen and firefighters is just as important what he does for soldiers, retirees, World War II veterans. He takes them down to the World War II museum every year. What he does for Gold Star parents and Gold Star families; every year he sends them to Disney World. I mean, he's our generation's version of Bob Hope; he really is.

WC: I love that man. I'm proud to say, and I'm very vocal about this, I don't keep it a secret that the company that I lead, Paul Mitchell Schools, have raised and donated over a million dollars to the Gary Sinise Foundation.

CK: Absolutely.

WC: And I hear there are over 40,000 different veteran-type nonprofit organizations and our alignment is with Gary's, specifically because of what the two of you just shared about the man, Gary Sinise, let alone the foundation, but the man Gary Sinise, so—

CK: Yeah.

WC: —you know. To wrap things up, Bryan, do you have a final message for our listeners?

BA: Yeah. Your mind is a very powerful thing and it could also hinder you. If you choose to think a certain way, like, *Oh, I can't do this or I won't be able to do that*, then guess what? You won't be able to do it. So, don't let your mind—just because you think you can't—stop you from trying to do something and figuring it out, because you can always adapt and overcome and your mind can be your greatest strength as well.

WC: Wow.

CK: Yeah.

WC: You know, I'm grateful to the two of you. I invite our listeners to go back and listen to the interview I did with Cedric King a couple of years ago; so, so powerful. Also, I just want to do a shout out to Gina and Laura from Health Interrupted who introduced me. They have a great podcast and they are the ones who introduced me to Bryan and made this happen and so I'm grateful to them. But Cedric and Bryan, just this is exactly—you can see and hear how emotional I am—this is exactly the stuff that I need to hear. I need to start every single day with this and it's incredible how much time we donate to conversations that do not matter. These are the conversations that matter and we need these conversations every single day and so my love and gratitude goes out to the two of you with—just very profound today. So, thank you both so much.

CK: Thanks.

BA: Thank you for all you do.

WC: Mm. I love you both. Thanks, everybody.